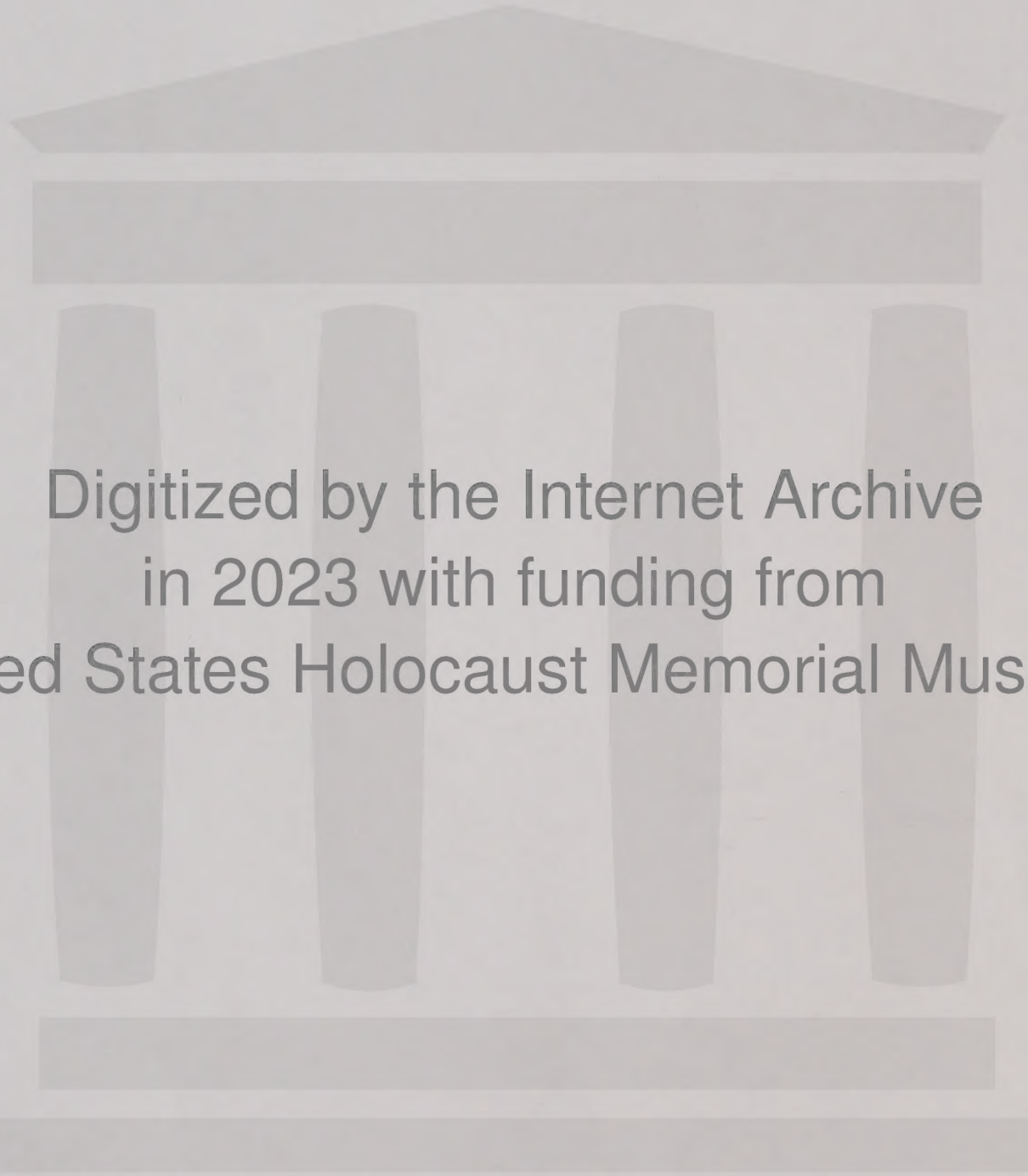




Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-678-9117 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://archive.org/details/bib292114>

Holocaust Survivors
Memoirs Project

I am sending my memoirs from
Holocaust in Poland for your
project

Theodore Mank

Stoughton July 26. 2001

Escape from Holocaust as told by Maximilian Mildwurm

The Early Years

I was born in 1920 to a low to middle-class Jewish family in the Lyczakow section of Lwow, then a part of Poland. My father was the second oldest of seven children. He had some training in art while in school and made a living as a sign painter. During World War I, he served as a soldier in the Austrian army where he learned to speak fluent German with the typical *Hoch Deutsch* accent. Whenever he spoke to Germans, they thought that he was German himself. Shortly after returning from the war, my father met a young Jewish girl, from a good Jewish family which lived nearby. She was 17 years old when my father proposed to her, and they were married shortly afterwards. Lwow was one of the principal cities of the newly independent Polish nation, and with a renewed atmosphere of rebuilding and new growth, my father had hoped to establish a good profitable business from which he would be able to provide for himself and his new family. The custom in those days that when a man gets married he would receive a dowry from the bride's parents which would help the newly married couple to establish themselves and form a solid foundation for a new life together. My mother's father promised my father a sizable dowry, but, as money was scarce after the war, he could not raise the money he had hoped to provide by the time of the wedding. He promised to provide more money as soon as it became available, but that just never happened. My father wanted to start his own business and was counting on getting some cash to get started. Despite continued reassurances from his father-in-law, the promised money, never did, in fact, materialize.

Although my mother loved my father very much and could not imagine life without him, they always had money problems. She was always asking for more money for the children, myself and my younger sister, Irene. She needed money to buy us clothes or some toys, to pay our school tuition, or just to have pocket money. My father was very frugal, and was constantly telling her they needed to keep tight control of her spending. He wanted to save his money for real emergencies, and to invest what money was available into his own business from which he had hoped to make his fortune. Disagreements on how to handle the little money that was available was always a source of argument between them. Having been trained as a graphics artist, and being reasonably good at it, he was finally able to open his first business for sign painting at *ulica Trzeciego Maja* near *Ogrod Jezuicki*, next to the University *Jana Kazimierza*. His business totally preoccupied his attention. He hired several people and was able to find various sign painting jobs for them. Although the business was beginning to make some money, there was still never enough. My mother was always asking my father for more money for my younger sister and myself and there were continuous quarrels between them. My father

regularly yelled at her for spending too much money. She was very unhappy and she said so. She sacrificed everything for the sake of her children.

In about 1936, my mother was very sick with severe stomach pains, which no one could do anything about. She was bed-ridden for several months and was in constant pain, frequently crying out. Her brother, Nathan Heffler, was a furrier in Paris, and offered to pay for her transportation to Paris get some much needed medical attention. My father would not provide the money for such a trip. She went to Paris and stayed there for some time, receiving the medical care she required. When she finally came back home she told us that a well-known surgeon had removed her appendix and she was now fine.

During that time, we had a live-in maid who took care of us and was always there. My mother did not work at home, but helped my father collecting payments due. She helped run the business, especially getting money from clients.

When my father had finally saved enough money, he bought a 5 family house and had very poor tenants who frequently did not pay the rent. He was quite busy chasing after delinquent tenants, threatening to sue them, taking them to court or even evicting them. I always thought that the whole enterprise was a poor business venture, and told him so. He should never have bought the house. He expected to make money on it, but it turned out to be a poor investment, and our money problems continued.

Before the war, my father's parents lived on Rzeznicka Street in Lwow. I would come over every once in a while to visit them in their home and they were always happy to see me. They lived in a small apartment consisting of two rooms and a kitchen and facing the back alley (not the street). My grandmother was very religious and observed all the religious holidays. She would constantly talk about her faith. I was one of the oldest of the grandchildren. My father's older brother, Joseph, was a big man who had lived for a while in Bavaria, Germany and, like my father, also spoke fluent German but with a slang accent, which I did not understand well. I understood only *Hoch Deutsch*. Although Joseph's daughter was actually about a year older than I, she lived only until 1938. My father's youngest sister, Betka was about 15 years older than I. She was unmarried and lived with her parents. Everybody else in the family was already married and had their own family, but she was still single and looking for a good man to settle down with.

My mother's mother moved in with us after her husband (my grandfather) had died. Towards her later years she was quite ill and remained mostly bedridden, and my mother had to look after her. Since we lived in a small apartment, I would do my homework in my grandmother's room and spent quite a bit of time with her. She liked for me to sit in her room while she would tell me stories, many of which I had already heard many times before. Sometimes, it could be difficult for me to get my homework done. Nevertheless, I

learned a lot from her, and she was a major influence on my early religious beliefs and outlook toward life.

Some of my early recollections of the grammar school I attended were that the teachers were rather strict. One teacher in particular, seemed to enjoy intimidating the students, and used to like to pick on some of them. He had a cane and frequently used it to hit students who did not live up to his expectations. I myself remember several painful episodes with the palm of my hand smarting for hours after being hit. In the beginning, I was not a particularly outstanding student, and received rather average grades. At the half-year point of my 5th grade, I was facing several F grades, including one in mathematics, and became really concerned that I could actually flunk out. By the second semester, I resolved to really study hard, so that by exam time, my teacher was very surprised when I answered all his questions correctly. He was very surprised at the transformation, since I had been such a poor student previously. I told him that I had learned my lessons and studied hard. He told me I was the best mathematician in the class, and deserved an A but he could not give justify that grade in view of my poor performance early in the year. He gave me a B.

While still in grammar school, I had noticed that several of the better students had stayed after class to play in the school chess club, so I tried to sign up to play chess. At that time, chess partners were selected by draw, and I ended up playing with one of the upper classmen in the school who turned out to be the school champion. I was only about 10 years old at the time, and quite short for my age. Although I beat him, I was not asked to play again until high school. In high school, I was still one of the shortest boys in the class up through the age of about 16, and did not hit my growth spurt until later. However, I was an exceptional math student and among the best in my class. I had also joined the chess team, and was consistently in first or second place on the team. I was a serious student throughout high school and had made many friends while there.

It was not until toward my latter years in high school that I had started to become aware of a strong sense of anti-semiticism among some of my classmates. On several occasions, I listened incredulously as some Ukrainian students were making very derogatory comments about Jews, talking about how much they hated them. Outside of school, anti-semiticism was even more blatant and I heard about and actually witnessed many violent acts against Jews. On several occasions, I had seen students running after bearded Orthodox Jews, breaking glass windows of shops owned by Jews, and threatening Jews on the streets. Many of these students belonged to anti-Semitic organizations such as *Boleslaw Hrobry*, named after a Polish king from the middle ages.

When I graduated high school in 1938, I wanted to go on with my studies but was afraid to go to the University in Lwow. I had heard of many episodes of anti-semiticism at the University, and even that 3 Jewish students were killed there. One of my friends,

Arnold Beck, told me about the Sorbonne University in Paris, France, and what a good school it was with none of the anti-Semitic problems in Poland. His father had offered to send him to Paris and help support him through his studies there by paying for books and lodging. I also wanted to go to the Sorbonne, and asked my father if he would help me go there to study. Perhaps my uncle Nathan could help me to go there. But my father did not think it was not necessary for me to go to Paris, and would not agree pay for this. He wanted me to go to the University Jana Kazimierza in Lwow and took me there to see what it was like. At the entrance gate, we saw a large group of students who were on the look out for Jews. We had heard of many episodes of Jews being prevented from entering the grounds of the University and being beaten at the gates. My father told me not to be afraid and came with me to the Admissions building. I took the entrance examination, and filled out the necessary application forms. There was also a medical exam that all students were required to take. I remember having to stay in line completely naked with the other student applicants. I was very self conscious that I was the only circumcised boy in the line, and realized I could be easily recognized as a Jew. I was not accepted to the University and was told that my grades were not good enough even though my grades were much better than those of many other students who were accepted. There was a strong anti-Semitic atmosphere at the University, and no Jews were granted admission.

When I did not gain entrance to the University, I had to find a job and hoped that I would be able to work with my father. However, he told me that that I should try to find a better job and sent me to a friend of his to work on a construction site. I was assigned to carry cement, a job which required much physical strength, which I did not have, and arrived home every night extremely exhausted. I did not like that work at all, and only lasted there a few weeks.

Russian Occupation

When the war first broke out in Sept. 1939, everyone took shelter in the basements of their houses during the siege of the city which took place from Sept. 12 to the 22.. We huddled in the basements over that time, very worried about what was to become of us. We were well aware that the poorly equipped and ill prepared Polish army could provide little effective defense against the powerful German forces. We were all terrified and expected to see German soldiers marching into Lwow at any time. Instead, when the bombing finally stopped, it was the Russian army who occupied the city. When the Russians entered, we all moved back into our own apartments. The Russians moved quickly to disband what was left of the Polish army. I could see the Polish soldiers standing in long lines turning in their uniforms and guns. The Polish officers tried to hide. They ran into various houses and alleys, trying to get rid of their uniforms, but many were caught and arrested. They were taken away and presumably shipped out to Prisoner-of-War camps, but to my knowledge, few if any of them, were ever heard from again.

After the Russians came into Lwow, the city gradually fell into a new routine, although now under a new communist regime. The larger businesses were taken over by the Russians, and many of the city's most prominent citizens shipped to Siberia as capitalists. The University reopened, and I again applied for admission. I wanted to study mechanical engineering, but was told that I did not meet the high standards required by the University. I subsequently found out that it was not strictly grades that mattered, but rather membership in communist run organizations and in some cases offering of substantial bribes. Although anti-semiticism was not a factor under the Russians, they gave strong preference to party members and political connections were a primary consideration. I was rejected, because I was seen as the son of a capitalist, since my father owned his own business, and as such was considered an enemy of the people. In fact, a friend of mine (Ignas) who had joined the communist party at the time told me after the war that he could have easily helped me to get in, but I was not aware of that at the time. I was very sorry I could not get into the university and was not looking forward to a career of manual unskilled labor. I was acutely aware of the importance of a college education as a basis for a good career and a successful, rewarding life, and have subsequently tried to impress that view on my children and grandchildren.

Since I had again failed to gain admittance to the University, I went to work at the "Winter Factory" which made scales. The original owner of the factory and his entire family were shipped off to Siberia as capitalists. The owner died there, but we heard his wife later remarried. One of his daughters, Matilda, who had been a friend of my sister Irene, eventually returned to Lwow after the war, and we had stayed in touch with her for some time. After working at the factory for several months, I received the Russian documentation as a laborer. That made me eligible for the University, and I applied again, this time being accepted. I had lost well over a year, first due to anti-semiticism and later for failure to have the correct communist credentials, but at last got the opportunity to return to my studies. During this time, Lwow was very much preoccupied with the preparations for war and acutely aware of the imminent approach of the German army.

German Occupation

There were many Ukrainians living in and around Lwow prior to the war. The Ukrainians hated the Russians and were looking forward to the Germans coming in and expelling the Russians from the area. Even before the arrival of the German army, there had been constant skirmishes between the Russians and the Ukrainian resistance. Many Ukrainian prisoners were held in the Lwow police station. As the Germans approached the city, the Ukrainian resistance became even more pronounced, and many Ukrainian prisoners attempted to run away in the confusion. Fearing the Ukrainians would continue to fight against them on the side of the Germans, the Russians had kept the captured

Ukrainian resisters imprisoned at the Lwow police station. Many of them were shot in the Police yard, especially as the resistance greatly intensified with the approach of the German army.

When the Germans finally entered Lwow in 1941, I was a 21-year old student attending still in my first year at Jan Kazimierz University. The first day, as the German army marched in a parade through the streets of Lwow the Ukrainians greeted them with loud cheers, throwing flowers to them. I went there to watch. I did not realize at the time, the major changes in all of our lives this event would bring.

When the German army gained control of Lwow, one of their first orders was to round up all the Jews of the city and to bring them to the police station for processing. The Ukrainians, who were working on the side of the Germans, hated the Jews and took on the task of rounding them all up for the Germans. When the Ukrainian vigilantes came to our apartment building, they told us that all Jews had to report outside. Any Jews who did not comply would be forcibly apprehended and killed. Everyone thought that those who went to the yard would not be harmed, but it was not the case. When we arrived at the police station, the Ukrainians lined us up against either side of the gate entrance to the yard until we could enter and be processed. Many were praying aloud. As I stood by the wall with the other Jews, I was very afraid but did not know what to do. I did not want to die. I tried to figure out how I could get away, but it was not possible at this time. I noticed that inside the police yard, there was a pile of dead bodies. The Germans were there with cameras taking pictures presumably to maintain careful documentation and records of their activities. When our turn came up, the Germans took our name, address, and other information. We were separated by age, sex and physical ability to be assigned as forced laborers to various jobs. The elderly and disabled, were considered of no value and were later shot.

One of the first duties assigned us by the Germans was to remove the dead bodies which were lying in the Police Yard. These had included Ukrainian resisters shot by the Russians just before they made their escape from the city, but also included more recently shot Jews. I was standing on the side of the yard, away from the others, when a German officer approached me and apparently mistook me for a local Polish boy. Since I was blond, and did not look Jewish, it was easy for me to pass as a Pole, and I took advantage of that situation whenever I could. He pointed to a big pile of bodies where one of the men in the pile still moving. The officer told me to remove him and take him away to the hospital. Apparently the German Police was given the order to stop the shooting, to allow them to make better use of the available manpower. After I made sure the man was in the hospital, I came back to the police station to see what they wanted me to do next. The Germans had ordered us to remove all the dead bodies from the yard over the next few days. We were allowed to go home at night to rest and return each morning until all the bodies were gone. The Germans had assured us that anyone working for them would not

be harmed. I had ended up spending the entire day removing the bodies of dead Jews and throwing them on the trucks. I can still remember the terrible stench, which permeated my hair, my clothes, and my entire body. That night, I couldn't wait to get into my bath. My mother washed my clothes very carefully. On the second day, I talked my father into coming back to the police station with me. I told him that as long as we worked for the Germans, we would be safe.

After the work at the police station was finished, we were taken to work at the end of Janowska Street, the site of the future concentration camp. At that time, this area was an open field where we worked throwing tires onto trucks and clearing the area. Later several barracks and various administration and other buildings were constructed on the site. At this time, the field was not yet fenced off or surrounded by barbed wire, as it would later become. Each night after work, we were allowed to go back home, but had to return the following morning to be assigned additional tasks. Food was scarce, but my mother managed to get hold of some kasha and would cook it every day. We managed to survive on that.

It was during the time I was working on the site of the concentration camp, that I came to hear about many more Jews being killed, including several members of my family. The Ukrainians continued rounding up Jews from their apartments and bringing them to the Police station. The elderly and those who could not work continued to be systematically killed. My grandfather, who had lived on ulica Rzeznicka, my grandmother who lived with us, my uncle and his son as well as many acquaintances were among those killed. Betka and her mother (my aunt and paternal grandmother) had managed to escape with the help of a kind Ukrainian man by the name of Kulczycki, whom she had befriended before the war. His wife was killed early in the war, and Kulczycki gave Betka his wife's documents. Betka changed her name to take the identity of his former wife, and also took her mother (my grandmother) to his home. In this way Kulczycki saved both Betka and her mother who from that time lived with him as his wife and mother-in-law. Although my grandmother survived the war, she died shortly after the war ended and before seeing me or my father (her son) again. Betka continued to live in Lwow until well into the 1960's and had corresponded regularly with my father and me.

Since my father spoke German fluently, he frequently talked with the Germans. They felt very comfortable talking with him, and often shared confidences which they would certainly not have discussed with other Jews. One day, my father was brave enough to ask the German soldier who was watching us what they were they planning to do with us. He told him, "All Jews are eventually going to be killed". My father and I therefore resolved not to return the next day and try to do whatever we could to survive as long as possible. Many German businesses were being established everywhere, and Jews were expected to work for them for little or no pay. In the beginning, although all Jews had to work, there were no specific assignments, and there was still some flexibility in

where we could find work, as long as we were useful to the Germans and were not caught without work.

Since my father felt comfortable talking to the Germans and was not afraid to tell them that we could be good and valuable workers, he was able to obtain a relatively prestigious position for himself and me working for a German manufacturing plant making guns and ammunition for the war. This enabled him to obtain documentation that he was performing an essential task for the war effort and protected him from any harassment. At this company, we met a Jewish man who had recently come from Germany. Since he had already experienced life as a Jew under German occupation, we also asked him what the Germans were like to work for. He assured us that Germany is one of the most cultured countries in the world and the Germans were a highly cultured people. According to him, the Jews who were killed had to be killed to establish the new German law, and ensure that order would prevail. Any remaining Jews would not be hurt as long as they were productive, since the Germans would certainly not harm anyone who could be of value to them. Obviously, he had accepted the German propaganda which they were disseminating as true. We were more skeptical, but wanted desperately to believe that the worst was over. In addition, we also still held to the hope that the Russians would eventually return to liberate us. We just had to manage to survive through these difficult times and were more likely to make it through if we abided by the German orders.

German Persecution Intensifies

In order to easily identify them from non-Jews, all Jews were forced to wear a white band with a blue star around their left arm with severe penalties if a Jew were caught on the streets without his band. However, it was not safe for unemployed Jews to be walking the streets by themselves during the day. Ukrainian vigilantes were constantly on the look out for Jews, and would stop to interrogate individuals without armbands, who looked at all like they might be Jewish. They would stop them to examine their papers and question them about what they were doing and why they were not at work. If anything looked even remotely suspicious, they would bring them to the German headquarters to deal with them. The Ukrainians worked very closely with the Germans who had promised them many things, including ultimately to help them free the Ukraine from the Russians. In the early period of the German occupation, the Ukrainians believed the Germans to be their friends and felt they were providing a valuable service to them by keeping an eye out on the Jews and delivering anyone who was not of sufficient use to them. However, within weeks of the German occupation, all Ukrainian flags were ordered to be removed and substituted by German flags. Eventually, it became quite obvious the Germans were not about to reverse their occupation and there would be no free Ukraine. All their territory would be incorporated into part of Germany and subject to German law.

Although early on, the Ukrainians were accepting bribes from some of the wealthier Jews, or confiscating their money for their own purposes, Germany quickly put a stop to this practice, and all valuables had to be turned in directly to the Germans by way of the Kahal, the Jewish own ruling body put in place by the Germans. The fate of all Jews lay strictly subject to German rule, and only the Germans would decide who is to live, and who could continue to be of value and how. The Germans organized the Jewish community by allowing them to select representatives to the Kahal, the Jewish government who would be directly answerable to the German occupation force and ensure that their wishes were carried out. The Kahal was the local ruling body through which German rules were imposed and a Jewish Police Force was organized to enforce these rules over all Jews. One day, I had met a former high school friend of mine, Wladek Zaks, who wore the blue uniform of the Jewish Police. Only wealthy Jews could join the Jewish police, since they had to come up with a large payment in order to be able to join. The Jewish policemen had certain privileges and were not beaten, fined, or sent to concentration camps as long as they carried out their assigned duties. One of their first duties was for collecting the "contributions" from the Jews. All valuables including cash, gold, jewelry and other treasures had to be turned over to the Jewish police to be handed over to the Germans. It was expected that as long as the Jews continued to provide the Germans with valuables, they would leave them alone, but as the demands kept getting bigger and bigger, the resources of the Jews were very quickly depleted.

The able bodied Jews were put to work in various factories and businesses to continue to contribute to the war effort. There was very little, if any, salary for this work, but at least they were allowed to live. Jews who had special skills, such as painters, mechanics and electricians were better off than others. Although conditions were very poor, many Jews managed to survive on the low salaries or prior savings which had not been confiscated. Many others would be forced to resort to begging on the streets for food or money in order to survive. Despite these developments, many Jews, continued to believe they would be left alone as long as they worked and were useful to the Germans. The Germans were very skilled at propaganda and deceit to get them to follow their bidding and get them to be more productive. Many were convinced that if they continued to work hard and abide by all German rules, they would not be harmed.

The Germans now began to use the Jewish Police to take over the process which the Polish Jews termed "Lapanka" meaning to catch and separate, and which was originally carried out by the Ukrainians. The Police would patrol the streets and be on the look-out for any remaining Jews who were still not working or did not have the required documentation. They even went from house to house checking all the occupants and their documentation to ensure all were properly employed. All Jews over 60 years old or those deemed incapable of work had to be turned over to the Germans. From there anyone who could not be assigned to a suitable job was sent to the concentration camps. The elderly, the disabled, and others not found to be of sufficient value, were simply killed. Initially,

the wealthier Jews would attempt to bribe the police to “overlook” their elderly or other unemployed family members, but such strategies did not work for long. These Jews had managed to hold out a bit longer, by asking non-Jews to sell them food in exchange for jewelry or any valuables they may still have possessed, but such possessions ran out quickly. Poor Jews had basically no chances and were the first to be turned over to the Germans where they would be placed in concentration camps or shot. Eventually, however, even Jews from the wealthier and better-connected families came to the same fate. The Germans had no use for Jewish children and later on, they too, would be separated from their parent and ultimately killed.

It became quite apparent that the Germans would not stop killing the Jews, but resistance was simply futile. Informants were everywhere and any indication of resistance was quickly squelched. Jews could be killed at even the slightest provocation, and the frequency of these killings continued to increase. The remaining Jews had smaller and smaller families as they would continue to lose their parents, brothers, sisters and even children. Many families tried to hide their elderly parents or unemployed family members but no place was safe. They started to build hiding places in cellars, to dig underground tunnels or to run away to hide in the forest. Many different strategies were attempted, but few were effective in eluding the German searches for long. Many Jews tried to hide or run away into the country where they hoped no one would recognize them. It was not really possible for Jews to turn to non-Jews for help, however, since anti-semiticism was quite wide spread and further fueled by the German propaganda. Jews asking for help were frequently turned in for some reward. Even those families who could otherwise be sympathetic toward the Jewish situation, feared for themselves and their families, since hiding Jews was against the law, and punishable by death. If direct blame could not be found, Jews would be rounded up at random and killed as an example to the others.

Most Jews, however, willingly complied with the German orders. The Germans kept up a strong psychological pressure on Jews so that they were always afraid that they were going to be killed and did not offer any resistance. The Germans were too strong. It was impossible to do otherwise. The Germans kept the Jews under constant pressure. Jews who obeyed the rules, could at least hope to live a little longer. Those who had lost all hope simply gave up because they did not believe life was worth living any longer, and were among the first to die.

The “Final Solution”

The Jews continued to be rounded up and relocated to the Jewish section, which came to known as the “Ghetto” where the Germans felt they could keep a better eye on them. Initially all Jews were encouraged to move to the Ghetto voluntarily, but later forced to do so. As the Ghetto was being organized, it was still possible to go in and out

to obtain supplies, find work, or visit others on the outside. During this time, I myself had visited friends there on many occasions. Eventually, however, the Germans build a tall wall around the Ghetto and the occupants were not allowed to go in and out for food or supplies without specific permits. Only individuals with official documents from the Germans could pass through the gates, and only on official business. Once trapped inside the Ghetto, it was no longer possible to get any help from those outside. Obtaining supplies was very difficult, and not much work was available that would ensure appropriate income to feed and properly clothe the Ghetto occupants. The winter was particularly harsh, and people began dying from hunger and typhus, an infectious disease that spread rapidly. Ultimately the Ghetto, too was closed down, and all remaining Jews were transferred to concentration camps.

By the autumn of 1942, the situation for the Jews in Lwow was getting quite desperate. By this time, the Germans had announced their "Final Solution" and orders were given for all Jews to be apprehended and eventually killed. No work permits or other exceptions were issued to Jews which would allow them to operate freely on the outside. All Jews were confined either to the Ghetto to which access was strictly controlled or were placed in concentration camps. An intense search for any remaining Jews was undertaken at the time and it was not really possible to hide any longer.

Some Jews tried to blend into the Polish population, and not wear the Star of David as required. However, Jews were frequently easily recognized by their typical Jewish features, or denounced by non-Jews who had known them previously. Only those Jews who did not look "Jewish" and managed to obtain some falsified papers had some chance to escape. However, to forge papers was not very easy as all papers were carefully scrutinized at frequent intervals. My cousin, Linka (Hanka Piantkowska) was blond like me and one of the few Jews fortunate enough to ultimately survive the war. Her father was in Krakow at the time the Germans entered Lwow, and was not among those who had been captured early and shot. Linka was married to a Jewish man, who looked very Jewish and had to take precautions about being seen outside his home. She had to hide him in their room in a small seat under the window whenever they thought anyone was approaching. Eventually, however, while she was away from home, he was found there and arrested. After the interrogation, he was put into prison and shortly thereafter killed. Upon returning home, Linka too, was arrested and interrogated. She had papers that identified her as a Catholic girl, and she claimed she did not know anything about hiding Jews. They believed her and let her go. Jewish men, once captured, however, could not as easily deny their Jewish background, since all Jewish men were circumcised while Polish Catholic men were not. This was something that could be easily checked and was. Although Linka hid her husband as long as she could, eventually he was discovered, and there was nothing she could do to prevent it. Anyone who even remotely looked like a Jew was immediately questioned and his documents checked. The Ukrainians were on the constant look out for Jews but they were not allowed to carry arms. When they found

someone they suspected of being Jewish, they brought them to the police station where they were examined, interrogated, and if discovered, sentenced to death immediately or sent to the Concentration camps, where they eventually were killed anyway.

Around the time when the German pressure on Jews was intensifying, my sister Irene had been continuously propositioned by a Ukrainian man who wanted her to live with him. She wanted nothing to do with him, but realized that antagonizing him could be dangerous. She therefore resolved to leave town to get away from his unwanted advances without raising any further investigations into the family. She had made arrangements to go to Radom, where, with her fluent German she easily got a secretarial job at a German run factory. Prior to her leaving, my father arranged for her to obtain a birth certificate from Tibura, a Catholic friend of his, who had a daughter near Irene's age. He knew that such a document would allow her to travel freely to another town and find employment without suspicion of her being Jewish.

Senuta Workshop

When the German government ordered that all Jewish persons wear a Star of David on their arm, my father initially complied, as did all other Jews. However, as he learned more and more about the way the Germans operated, he looked for an opportunity to establish his own business where he would be free to disguise himself as a non-Jew and retain some degree of freedom. He could then stop wearing the Star – a very dangerous move, but a risk he felt he had to take if he were to escape the fate that was increasingly befalling the Jews. He learned quickly what was needed to get around many of the German restrictions and obtain the necessary documents to ensure survival under the very difficult conditions of the German occupation.

My father knew that Jews were not allowed to own their own businesses, and that he could not simply reopen his shop by himself. He therefore made plans to enter a partnership with a Ukrainian man by the name of Senuta, whom he had acquainted. According to their arrangement, the company would be put under Senuta's name (rather than my father's) as the owner of the company, in return for which he would be given half the ownership and half the profits. The law allowed a Ukrainian person to get title to property without having to do anything. My father and Senuta were both taking a very big risk in setting up this business since Jews were not allowed even partial ownership and if this was discovered, both could be arrested and shot. My father and I had to be very careful not to divulge to anyone that we were Jewish. We were able to get away with it for some time, since we did not look Jewish. We all worked very hard and made a reasonable income for those days, but half of all the income went to Senuta, who was only a passive partner in the business. The Senuta Workshop was doing a significant portion of their work for the Germans, and my father managed to obtain German work certificates

identifying him as performing essential work for the German army, giving him various freedoms. Such documents were very valuable, and he was smart enough to arrange to get these for himself and me.

Of all the members of our family, my father was the most energetic and successful. Since he owned his own sign painting business, he could afford to offer financial and other assistance to other family members during this period. My father did as much for his family as he could, but it could never be enough. There was just no real hope for the Jews.

The Arrest

Whereas my father and I did not look Jewish and easily passed as Polish workers, my mother's obvious Jewish features made her easily recognizable as a Jew and she had to be very careful to stay out of sight. With the initiation of the "Final Solution" by the Germans, there had been intensive efforts to seek out and find remaining Jews who were still on the outside. As we had to work everyday in our workshop, my father did not want to leave my mother alone in the house while he and I were at work, for fear someone could come snooping by and discover her. The Ukrainian police regularly conducted house-to-house searches on any report of suspicious activities, and my father felt she would be safer near him in the workshop. One day, a disgruntled Ukrainian woman janitor who worked in the house where the shop had been located had informed on us to her boyfriend, who was a policeman and sent him to our workshop to check it out. She had harbored some resentments against my mother from before the war, when my mother had criticized some of her work. Fearing arrest, my mother had hidden for several days on a large shelf near the ceiling in the back of the shop. We would need to use a ladder to get her to climb up there when we thought that someone might come looking, and she had been spending large parts of the day up there for several days. She became very depressed by that time and did not want to hide anymore. When the Ukrainian police finally came and began to look around, my mother did not want to fight anymore and resigned herself to die. She spoke up from her hiding place and was immediately apprehended. My father was also arrested for hiding a Jew. When the police came to our shop, I was in the yard cleaning some boards. When I saw that the policeman was going to arrest my father and my mother, I went in as well and gave myself up. I thought at the time that whatever happens to my parents, I should stick by them. I was young and did not know any better. I would not know where to go on my own or what to do. Later I was sorry for giving myself up voluntarily since I could have just as easily run away. That day, I was wearing a white coat for painting. In those days, when I worked in my father's business I never wore the Star of David as required by law. I was taking a big chance, but nobody in the area even knew that I was Jewish. I could have simply walked away, but I did not. I did

not know enough to run away and hide. In 1942, I was 22 years old and was too scared to do anything.

In thinking back over this period, I never quite understood why my father, who had been so wise in eluding the Germans up to that point, had failed to prevent my mother's arrest. He could have offered a bribe to the policeman which was a common practice at the time, or try some excuse to get away. I did not feel qualified to take decisive action myself, but afterwards felt like I should have done something since my father did not. I just felt very helpless at the time, and simply did not know what to do. Throughout my life I have been haunted by the memories of the arrest and trying to figure out what could have been done to keep us from being arrested.

The Ukrainians took us to the German Police station where Jews were being turned in all the time. When we came to the station, the Germans took my Russian passport which identified me as being Jewish. I should have thrown away my passport and said I forgot it and they might have let me go. But I believed that once I was caught I would have to follow the rules. In any case, I would not want to be separated from my parents. Jews did not try to run away when apprehended or challenged and had little hope of escape.

Despite tremendous odds, however, my father had somehow managed to elude the Germans. While awaiting processing at the police station, he hid in the men's room and when anyone entered, he acted like a janitor and pretended that he was cleaning the toilet. After everything quieted down, he simply walked out unchallenged and went home.

Life in the Concentration Camp

After our arrest, my mother and I were taken to the Janowska concentration camp. Once at the camp, the men and women were separated. After I was processed and taken into the camp, I noticed my mother on the other side of the fence, still waiting her turn in line. I managed to make my way to the fence and approached her. We had a chance to speak briefly. She passed me 500 zloty, all the money she had with her at the time, and her wedding band since she knew these would be taken from her. She believed her situation to be quite hopeless and did not think she would have much chance to survive. I had to say goodbye to my mother through the wire fence. I did not realize at the time that this would be the last time I would see her. I heard later that she had been taken to the gas chamber along with a group of women to be killed.

The men were further separated on the basis of their potential abilities. The old men were stripped naked and sent to the gas chamber at the outset. They gave the young surviving men the old men's clothes so that no one could smuggle anything in their own

clothes. On these clothes were painted large vertical white stripes so that we could be easily identified as prisoners. Once dressed in our new "uniforms", we were sat on the ground and given some rotten potatoes to eat. I tried to eat them, but just couldn't and threw them on the ground. A young Jewish boy immediately jumped on them and stared to eat them, without even bothering to wipe the dirt and sand off first. It was then that I began to realize what life in the concentration camp was going to be like. I would have to eat whatever food was available if I were to keep up my strength and survive. I suddenly found the desire to live at any price. I did not care if the Germans would beat me or subject me to various humiliations and suffering. I was determined to live. I believed that eventually the Germans would be defeated, and I had to do what I could to survive until then.

Later that night, we were taken to the barracks where people were sleeping under very overcrowded conditions, one against the other, on large, hard, 3-tiered wooden bunks. It was very cold, and there were no blankets. There was no place for me to sleep. I tried to talk some of the inmates into making room for me to fit in, that I too was a victim like them and entitled to at least some space on the bunks, but no one would make a move to accommodate me. I could not lie down on the damp, cold ground, because it was much too cold, and I did not want to get sick. The best I could do was to try to dose off for short periods of time in a standing position while leaning against something. I was not able to get any real sleep during the entire first week in the concentration camp.

In the morning, I was asked what skills I had, and when I indicated I was a painter, I was assigned to a job in a nearby painting factory. We would sit at long tables and have to paint various signs on plywood planks. I worked there every day, but without any sleep, it was very difficult to stay awake and be very productive. In the evenings, we were given our only meal for the day, typically a small bowl of a soup made from a few cabbage leaves or other very cheap vegetable and a small slice of bread. Often the food would be made from rotten vegetables and smell bad, but we had to eat it since there was nothing else available. We were always hungry and getting weaker and weaker with each day. After about a week like this, I had noticed one sleeping place on the upper bunk that was empty, presumably from a prisoner who had died or was transferred elsewhere. I immediately tried to get up to that space and claim it as my own. The man who was in the adjacent space, however, would not let me in and shoved me off the bed. Somehow, I regained my balance and climbed back up and we started to fight. I was much stronger than he, since I had only been there one week and he had been there much longer. He tired very quickly and I was able to win the empty spot. I did not want to hurt him or antagonize a future bedmate, however, so I explained to him that I did not wish him any harm, but had not been able to find a place to sleep for a whole week, and it was not right to leave a space unoccupied. I asked to be allowed to take that space, and he finally agreed. After one week of trying to sleep standing up, I was finally able to have my own sleeping place and slept soundly that night.

After a few weeks in the camp, my uncle Joseph, who had also been captured, and I were chosen to be among the few Jews who were taken on a truck to the center of the city to work. We were assigned a job of picking up trash, cleaning bricks, and performing various odd jobs. Once in town, I secretly asked someone on the street to buy me a loaf of bread for the 500 zlotys that my mother had given me. I gave one slice of bread to my Uncle Joseph and ate one slice myself. I decided to make that bread last as long as I could and allotted one slice to myself and one to my uncle each day, to allow us to keep up our strength a little longer, and increase our chances for survival.

Life in the concentration camp was beyond imagination. We were in a constant state of terror. We were very weak because there was never enough food. People were dying after only a few weeks there. The work was strenuous and we were beaten constantly. We were living under very terrible conditions. During the day, if one had the strength to work, did what he was told, and did not call attention to himself, it was at least possible to get by, but the evenings were particularly terrifying. After work each evening, all prisoners would be lined up in the yard and the leader of the concentration camp would examine them. Those who looked too ill or weak to work would be selected out and taken away to be shot. The camp leader would lecture us in German, which I understood. He told us that if we wanted to survive, we must obey all the orders and do everything we are told. He explained that it was necessary to remove those who were ill to prevent further spread of typhus, which would endanger all of our lives. They had to get rid of the weak and sickly people to protect the rest of us from dying. People would be shot every day, and we were told they were doing this for our own good. As new prisoners were brought into the camps each day, the elimination of the weakest ones intensified to keep the already well-overcrowded conditions in the camp from getting even worse. People would be shot on the slightest provocation, and if there was any indication of insubordination, they would be made as an example to the others. On some occasions, the German leader would go behind us and count to ten, and every tenth person was shot.

We lived in constant terror. We were never left alone even when we went to the bathroom. One time during work hours, I wanted to go to the toilet, which consisted of a log dropped over an open ditch. While people would try sit there in order to relieve themselves, the German guards would beat them constantly to hurry them along. This was very degrading. Sometimes they would beat them so much that they would have to temporarily run away, but had to keep coming back until they were finished. The place always had a terrible smell. I do not know how the Germans could even stand it there.

Each group of prisoners was assigned their own Jewish leader through whom all orders were communicated. On one occasion the Jewish leader of our group had complained to the Germans that one of the men in his group was not following his instructions. The German asked, "How is that possible, you are more powerful than he,

and if he does not listen, simply beat him with your stick.” The leader replied that the man was bigger and stronger than him, and would not be bullied. Without any further explanation, the German simply walked up to the man, and told him to “get up”. The man started to cry and beg for his life, saying that it was all a misunderstanding and he will do whatever he is told. “I do not want to die”, he cried, but the German shot him in the back of the head anyway. I saw the shooting, and watched as he lay there on the ground and watched with horror as the blood quickly spilled all over the ground. It was a terrible sight, and one I could never forget. Even after the war, I would picture that scene in my mind and it would continue to haunt me.

To serve as a detriment to others who might be tempted, every time there was an escape attempt, the Germans would randomly kill 10 Jews for each attempt. Those who escaped and succeeded would live with the knowledge that 10 men were killed in their place. Those who tried to escape and failed would have to stand and watch the 10 men being shot before they themselves would be allowed to be killed. A common punishment for those who were caught trying to escape was tying them up to a pole in the middle of the yard and leaving him there without any food or water for days until they died. Every morning as we went to work, we would have to walk by Jews hanging by their hands and legs like animals. They would be moaning and crying out because they were suffering. Dead bodies would be taken away on a daily basis. Watching such treatment on a regular basis had a terrible psychological affect on all of us, and made us realize just how futile any resistance was.

The German sense of justice was sometimes very difficult to comprehend. There was a very big and strong Jewish man who had tried to run away, but was caught. Because of his great strength, the Germans gave him a choice. He could get 25 lashes of the whip, or he could be shot immediately. He chose the beating. People who heard this were very surprised, since they knew there was no way he would be allowed to live anyway, and why would he subject himself to possible prolonged torture when a quick shot could end it for him with little suffering. The Germans selected Jewish prisoners to the beating. They beat him for so long, that they needed to replace the prisoners beating him several times as they become tired. By the time they were finished he was very near to death. For some reason, the Germans had him carried back to his barracks and did not kill him. He survived somehow, which surprised everyone. Of course, I do not know what could have happened to him later, as they may have had other plans for him in the future.

There was once a 16-year-old boy who tried to run away from the camp. He was caught very quickly since there was no one on the outside who would help him or hide him in their homes. He was soon returned to the concentration camp. All the prisoners were assembled and the German officer gave a speech that this boy will be punished for trying to escape. The boy was tied to a pole, but since he was only 16 years old, the

commander told those assembled, this boy would not be left there to die like others who had tried before him. It would be cruel to do that to someone under the age of 18. Instead, the officer turned, started walking toward him, and began shooting at his legs and hands as he did so. He kept shooting at his limbs, injuring him, but not killing him. He walked very slowly, shooting him over and over again as he came closer and closer. The boy was crying terribly, begging to please be finished off. At last, the officer shot him in the head and the boy was finally killed.

Once a month all the prisoners would be loaded in a truck and driven about a mile outside the camp to a large public shower building. They would strip us down and turn on the showers and after we washed, bring us back to the camp. On one occasion, the German soldiers in charge of us were drunk, and just for fun, stood outside of the stalls with machine guns and took turns shooting at us as we showered. Those who remained alive after the shower were made to switch their clothes with the clothes of the dead people.

The treatment of Jews in the concentration camps was totally inhumane and difficult to imagine how anyone could be treated that way, with such a low regard for human dignity and human life.

The Escape

Two of my cousins, Mundek and Lonek were also imprisoned in the same concentration camp with me. Lonek was a painter like me but Mundek performed various jobs on the streets outside the camp. One day, I asked Mundek to take a letter to my friend Rena Shenta and he agreed to do so. He delivered the letter to her, and the next day Rena showed up as we were going to work outside the camp. Although the Germans were watching us carefully, she managed to walk by and hand me something to eat. I asked her to let my father know where I was and that I was alive.

The next day my father came to the part of town in which we were working. He also brought me something to eat. Although it was very risky since a pattern of behaviour was much easier to spot, he came to see me every day. One day he told me that he knew the Jewish leader of one of the groups in the camp and would try to get him to help me escape. This man had worked for my father before the war and my father promised to give him some paint, which would allow him to get a better job with the Germans. His friend agreed to help me. A few days later, my father's friend made arrangements for me to get into a truck which was making deliveries to the camp, and to cover myself completely so that no one would see me. I hid under a blanket in the back of the truck and remained very still while we went out through the gate. My father had provided regular street clothes for me to wear under my prison uniform and a hat to hide my shaved head,

which would easily identify me as an inmate from the concentration camps. The Germans were checking all outgoing trucks, and this was an extremely dangerous attempt, but somehow I was not noticed. I was very lucky. I knew that if I succeeded, they would kill 10 prisoners in my place, but I had to take the chance to get away when I could.

After the truck stopped for a while, I sneaked out and ran as fast as I could. I had taken off the prison uniform that was covering the shirt and pants my father had given me. I took out the hat from my pocket, put it over my bald head and ran off to my aunt Betka's house. When I saw her, I told her that I had just ran away from the concentration camp and asked her to help me. She asked where the truck was now, and I told her it was only a few blocks away. She told me that I had to go back immediately, because once they discovered I was missing they would search the whole neighborhood for me and there was no place that I could be hidden. If they were to find me there, they would not only take me, but also arrest her and her entire family and take them away as well. I had not realized that my actions would put so many people in very grave danger. I had thought that if they were to find me they would simply take me back, but she explained that it was not quite that simple, and anyone suspected of helping me in any way, would also be killed.

I decided that I would have to rely on my own resources to escape and did not wish to further endanger other family members. I returned to the back of the truck and climbed back in. The man who was driving the truck and his helper were Jews from the Polish army. They had better conditions than the other Jews and had somehow won the confidence of the Germans. The Germans were not worried about whether someone would run away because there was simply no place for them to go. All prisoners wore striped clothing and had shaved heads and could be easily identified and caught. I lay in the back of the truck as it made its various stops. It was very hot and uncomfortable and I was very scared. Finally, at one stop, the truck stayed in one place for quite a long time. I thought that this might be my last chance to run away again and I jumped out. I left my striped jacket in the truck. Without the change of clothes I would have been immediately spotted and recognized as an escaped prisoner.

This time I ran to the house of a friend of mine, Daniel Nusbaum, and told him about my situation. I asked him to find my father and he went off immediately. It was far away, but he managed to get him. My father came to Daniel's house, and it was such a relief to be reunited with him again! I was no longer alone, and had someone who could help me. At last, there was a chance that we could get away from the Germans. While in the concentration camp, I had injured my heel, and left untreated, it became badly infected. My father brought me to my cousin Andzia's house. Her husband was a doctor, and he cleaned out the gangrene and put dressing on my heel. We spend the first night there, but it was clear that it would not be possible for us to hide undiscovered for long. He decided we would have to make our escape from the city to where we would not be

recognized. We had to move quickly since there was sure to be a search, and our chances of remaining hidden were slim. Throughout the first few days and weeks of my escape, my heel continued to be very painful, and I had to walk for many miles while keeping my weight off it.

My father resolved that we should try to escape to Krakow as quickly as possible and we made our way to the train station under cover of night. We hopped on the first train heading east, and somehow the conductor controlling the tickets missed us. We pretended that we were sleeping and he did not disturb us. We had to change trains in Tarnopol. When we got off the train, the Polish Bahnshutz (train officer) in a German uniform approached me and asked me for my documents. My father had provided me with a Polish birth certificate that he had previously bought from a stranger, in anticipation of our escape. The Bahnshutz looked the document over and began asking me several questions. I remembered the name on my document, but was not sure about the birth date. I said my birthday was the 19th instead of the 18th. He noticed the discrepancy and became suspicious. I explained that I was born on the night between the 18th and the 19th, but actually since it was past midnight, it was recorded as the 19th. He just laughed and let me go.

While I was being interrogated, my father had quietly slipped away, so that I had gotten separated from him again. I was very worried. Being only 22 years old at the time and very inexperienced, I just did not know what to do at the time. How I would be able to survive on my own. My father was much smarter than I, and I depended on his guidance and advice. I had no money, but only a briefcase which my father had given me. The briefcase contained some articles of clothing and other belongings. I was very tired and sleepy and lay down on the floor of the station waiting for the next train to come in. As I tried to sleep, a policeman approached me and told me that I was to come with him, which I did. On the way, he picked up another man and told him to come with us also. We went together to the station room where there were some Germans soldiers. I let the other two men go in first, turned around and started to run away as fast as I could out of the station. After a few moments, I noticed the policeman (Bahnshutz) was running after me. I ducked behind a house and watched him as he passed by. Luckily, he did not see me and I got away. Not being able to go back to the train station for fear of discovery, I started walking along the tracks to the next station. After walking through the night on my very painful heel, I reached the next station by morning. A few hours later, the train arrived. I boarded and was on my way to Krakow.

On My Own

My father had disappeared and I was on my own. I did not want to be alone and did not know what to do. I just could not understand how my father could have left me

alone with only a few small coins in my pockets. He should at least have stayed nearby and to see what would happen and come back if it was safe. I did not know anyone outside of Lwow, and had no idea where I could stay or how I could eat. When I finally arrived in Krakow, I hoped that somehow, perhaps I might be able to find my father somewhere on the streets of the city. I knew it would take some kind of miracle, but I had to have some hope. I was very tired and hungry. I approached a group of young people, a man and two women, and asked them if they knew of any place where I could stay for the night. The man began to ask me all kinds of questions, and since I had little hair under my cap, he said he knew that I was a Jew and threatened to take me to the Germans. He said I should not be out on the streets and that I belonged in the ghetto. One of the women pulled him by the hand and told him not to make any trouble. She and the other woman finally pulled him away. Although I was safe for the time being, I felt very lost and helpless. I was scared and did not know what to do next.

I started walking around the streets of the city looking for paint shops, and asking for possible employment. I found a small painting company where I talked to the wife of the owner. I told her that I was looking for a job and showed her my documents. Her husband was Polish but took Volksdeutsch Citizenship. By taking this citizenship a Polish person could get more rights, more food, and more benefits but in exchange would have to fight on behalf of the Germans if necessary. He agreed to give me the job but I would have to pay for my own food. I agreed. I spent the few zloty I still had left to buy a loaf of bread from him. He then told me that I could sleep on the truck and gave me a dirty cover to cover myself with. In the morning I was given some black paint and told to paint the underside of the truck. I had to go under the truck to paint it. When I was finished, my entire body was covered with paint spots because of the paint droppings. After that, he gave me other jobs and I was kept very busy. One day the man came with his son, who was with the SS (German Police). I became very scared. However, to my surprise, they talked to me in a very friendly manner. They told me that they know that I am a Jew but they would not turn me in. However, I would not be allowed to stay there any longer and would have to leave. They told me his wife hates Jews and would turn me in as soon as she could. It was not safe for me to stay there any longer. I asked them if they could suggest where should I could go to find another job. They suggested I go to Konieczpol, a small village where I should be able to find something to do over there.

I left Krakow that day and made my way from one village to another looking for a job. The people living there were simple farm workers who were paid very low wages to work the land that belong to the aristocratic class, known as Szlachta. The Szlachta were living relatively well during the war, and had many such workers running their farms for them. These workers were very poor and lived in shacks under very poor conditions. In contrast, the owners lived quite well, and sometimes the Germans would stop by to visit them and were quite friendly to them.

After traveling several days, the owner of one of the farms finally agreed to give me a job. He told me that I could sleep in the chicken coop and that my job will be to watch his gardens and fields to make sure no one will steal any apples. I could eat as many apples as I wanted, but would get no other pay or food. I was very happy, and considered myself very fortunate to find such a job. All I needed was a place to sleep and some food. I stayed on the farm all day and night watching out for potential thieves. I would keep watch for about 18 hours a day and take quick naps in between. There were plenty of apples and I was very happy. One day, the owner approached me and told me that the villagers are beginning to say that I am a Jew. I had tried very hard to blend in with the locals and pass for a Christian. I went to church every Sunday and pretended to pray along with everyone else, although I did not know any of the prayers. I pretended as best as I could, but people noticed that I did not know what I was doing. The farm owner finally told me that I would have to leave, because the people who suspected me would come to find me and hurt me. I thanked him for his warning and for letting me watch his fields and eat his apples. I agreed to leave right away because I didn't want to cause him any trouble after he had shown me such kindness. I asked him if he could give me some bread to take with me for the trip. He agreed, and I was on my way again.

I stopped to talk to some villagers who had a small house nearby and told them that I needed a place to stay and a job. They were quite friendly and agreed to help me. They let me send a letter to my aunt Betka telling her where I was and that I needed help finding my father. I stayed with them a few days and received a letter back from my aunt telling me that my father was in Krakow working as painter. My aunt also let my father know where I was, and he immediately set out to look for me. When my father arrived in the village, he made inquiries about me in the house for which I had been watching the apples. They told him that I had been working there for a while, but had gone several days ago. They gave him the direction in which I had headed when I left. He went looking everywhere for me, and when he couldn't find me, left a letter at the house for me in case I should ever return there, giving me the address of his work.

I had to keep moving, until I could find a safe place to hide out. I came upon a priest who had a few acres of land and was hiring people to work for him. He had a big dog that bit at me but I did not mind. I started to work there loading hay onto wagons, taking care of the animals and performing other physical chores as required. The job was quite strenuous, and I had a difficult time with it because I was very weak. However, I did what I could. One day the priest came up to me and asked me to recite the *Zdrowas Mario* (Hail Mary). I did not know it and told him it had been some time since I last said it, and had forgotten it. He said, "That is impossible. You did not forget. You are a Jew". At last, I had to admit to this and asked him what I should do. I asked him to teach me how to be a Christian and to baptize me. He told me that the Germans would not allow him to do that, but when I die, I can pray to God and baptize myself and would go straight to heaven. He told me I would not be allowed to stay there any longer and would have to

leave. I asked for his permission to spend the night, and agreed to leave in the morning. After breakfast, I asked him if he could give me a piece of bread for my journey, but he refused and sent me off empty handed.

After the priest made me leave, I returned to the apple orchard owner's house where I had stayed previously, and he gave me the letter my father had left for me there. I thanked again him for all his help and set off for Krakow to find the address my father indicated. On the way, I stopped to find a job for food and shelter cleaning out leaves of tobacco, which were very moldy and stank terribly. I worked several days there until I could save enough for food and to complete my journey to Krakow.

Krakow

When I arrived in Krakow, I immediately proceeded to the shop of Laszkiewicz, the sign painter whose address my father had given me. Laszkiewicz told me that my father indeed had been working there, but was not sleeping there, and gave me my father's home address. By then, it was already quite late at night, and I was very tired and reluctant to go wandering alone in the dark in unfamiliar neighborhoods. I asked if he would mind if I spent the night there and went to look for my father the following day. His wife answered that they did not have any space for me there. I explained that I do not need much space and could sleep on the floor in the work area, but she would not allow that either. I obtained the directions to the house where my father was staying and after some searching found the house indicated. I knocked on the door and found my father at home. He was very surprised to see me at last. I too was very happy to be reunited with him again, and thought that now at last I no longer needed to be wandering aimlessly and would have much better chances to survive with him. The owner of the house where my father lived had rented some of her rooms to boarders, several of whom shared a single room. My father shared a room with two other men, each of whom had their own beds which were stuffed with straw. Although his bed was quite small, he shared his bed with me, and we continued to live together like that in very crowded conditions over the next few months.

The next morning we went to Mr. Laszkiewicz's shop and he agreed to hire me also. He paid me 1 ½ zloty per hour. A single loaf of bread cost 10 zloty. Each day we would eat in a kind of a soup kitchen where we were able to buy some soup for 2 zloty. Although we were quite poor, we were safe and everything was finally beginning to look up.

About half a year after our reunion in Krakow, my father found a better job at a different paint factory which paid more money. There, he met a Polish woman and they began going together. One day, as my father was walking down the street with this woman, he was approached by the Gestapo and arrested. He later believed this woman

had suspected that he may have been Jewish from some of the stories he had told her and had arranged his arrest in exchange for some money. He was taken to the Plaszczow jail in Krakow where he was interrogated and beaten when he refused to admit to being a Jew. After the beating, his entire back was covered with deep scars. After a few days at the jail, he was taken to the Oswiecim (Auschwitz) concentration camp in Chestochowa.

When I arrived home from work on the day my father was arrested, our landlady came up to me to tell me that the Gestapo had come there earlier in the day looking for my father and had taken all his clothes and belongings. She said she had no choice but to give it to them. I later learned that my father had been taken to the Plaszczow jail but was unable to obtain any further news about him until after the war. I realized that someone must have denounced him, and it became increasingly clear that we could never let down our guard and could trust no one. So yet again, my father and I were separated. I spent that last night in our old room, but resolved to get away from there first thing in the morning before the Gestapo come back and started making additional inquiries about me as well.

During my stay in Krakow, I had met another painter by the name of Tylko. In the evening he played chess with a group of other people so I joined them, and frequently won many of the games. The day after my father was arrested, I went to Tylko and told him that I was in trouble. I explained that the Gestapo was in my former home and I did not feel safe going back there. I asked him what I should do. Tylko agreed to help me and offered me to stay with him. He believed that I was with the Polish resistance and that was the reason they were looking for me. He told me he would be able to find some work for me and allowed me to stay with him, where I shared a room with his brother. They were very poor people, but at least they were relatively safe from the Germans and were not bothered by them. Anyway, I had a job, and a place to stay, and again considered myself quite fortunate.

Tylko and his wife were very kind people and treated me quite well. In the evening at dinner Tylko's wife asked me whether I could eat 8 eggs. She told me that her husband always eats 8 eggs for supper, but I answered that that was much too much! How could one person eat so much? Still, she made me 7 scrambled eggs, and I had no trouble eating all of them. In fact, I could have eaten another 8 eggs. I did not realize just how hungry I had been. I thought of how stupid I was to try to be polite and say I did not want to eat all the eggs when that was being offered to me.

The next day, Mrs. Tylko told me that there was a German soldier looking for painters to paint signs on company cars. The job was located about an hour's walk from their house. Tylko did not want to work directly for the Germans, since they were very demanding and difficult to please. He told them that he already had a job and had to take care of his wife so that he would not be able to do it. However, he knew it was not wise to

refuse to work for the Germans when asked, but suggested that perhaps I would be interested in this. I told him I would not mind taking that job and he was very grateful. He agreed to let me sleep there while I was working for the Germans, and I continued to work for him as well whenever there was time. The following day, I got in touch with the German man about whom Tylko told me and he gave me the job. It was a long walk to work each day, but I was paid 10 zloty per hour, significantly more than I had been able to get at any other time since working for my father. My German employer was very friendly to me and invited me to have dinner with them each night. A frequent meal was "ein topf geshicht" (stew), which had potatoes, vegetable, and meat all in a single dish. The food was wonderful and I was very happy to have such good food once each day. An additional advantage of working for the Germans was that I was provided documents which identified me as a valuable worker for the German army which permitted me to go to many places without being harassed by the local police, and provided many important privileges.

During this period, I had kept in touch with my sister Irene, who I knew had been working in Radom. I wrote to her about my situation, and she strongly advised me not to jeopardize my safety by working so closely under the Gestapo's eyes. The Gestapo were very suspicious and could start digging into my documents and find discrepancies for which I would not be able to account. Any false move, careless statement or accusation from someone who might have a grudge against me could trigger an investigation. It was not safe for me to continue in this position for any time. She offered to help me find a new job by placing an advertisement in a German newspaper in Czestochowa stating that an experienced painter was looking for a job and listing my address. After a few days, I received a letter from the "Warnolit" paint factory in Czestochowa informing me that they were hiring sign painters. I therefore left my job in Krakow and made my way to Czestochowa, again having to run for fear of being discovered.

Czestochowa

When I arrived in Czestochowa, I made my way to the "Warnolit" factory, where I was offered a job as a painter. This factory was owned by a Mr. Alas who was a member of the German party [Volksdeutsch]. The job paid 2 zloty per hour, and could have been more, if I had agreed to help the owner with his theft problems. The owner explained that there had been a major problem with theft in the factory, and his paints, supplies and other materials were disappearing on a regular basis. Through a Polish interpreter, he asked me to keep an eye on what was going on and to report to him if I had seen any illegal activities. Although I understood German quite well, I told the interpreter I did not understand since I felt very uncomfortable being placed in this type of situation. Finally I agreed only to work for him painting or doing other jobs, but was not willing to get involved in spying on my fellow workers. The owner thanked me for my honesty, and

offered me the job anyway. I was given a small room and asked that a bed be supplied for me as well, and he agreed.

While working in the factory, I did indeed notice that there was a lot of theft going on. I soon understood that this was a common occurrence at most factories throughout the German occupied territories, and a major source of badly needed income for the local inhabitants. One day one of the Polish workers stole a 5-liter bottle of gasoline, and when he saw someone approaching, stuffed it into my bag which I brought to my work each day. I saw him putting the bottle there, and of course knew the bottle was stolen. I knew that the thief could be killed for this and I myself could be in a lot of trouble if it were found in my bag. Later that afternoon, a man whom I knew from the job came by and took my bag with the gasoline in it and went home. Since I wanted my bag back, I asked another fellow worker for his address, and was told he lived only a five-minute walk away. When I went there for my briefcase, I was invited into the house and met his family. I particularly took a liking to his sister-in-law, a young girl by the name of Henia who treated me very well and made me welcome in the house. She invited me to stay for dinner, and I started going there more frequently in the future.

My sister Irene's story

When I was staying in Czestochowa, I continued to stay in touch by mail with my sister Irene who was still living in Radom. The Gestapo were looking for Jews in the German-owned company where she worked as a secretary. They came to the company during lunch break and were asking for Jews who were working there. One of the workers, who Irene knew to be Jewish was coming back to work, and Irene tried to signal him to get away as quickly as he could. He did not quite understand the message, however, and stood in the yard, confused, and undecided as to what to do. In the meantime, a Polish girl went up to him and told him to come with her since someone was looking for him. Not suspecting anything, he went with her to the company office where the Gestapo began to question him and later took him back to the station for more extensive interrogation. Once found guilty of being Jewish, he was asked if he knew any other Jews in the area, and was beaten. Under interrogation, he told them he thought that my sister might be a Jew because she tried to help him. When they took my sister in for interrogation, she told them that she had nothing to do with this man and that she was certainly not a Jew. He only accused her because he resented her position in the company, and she could provide witnesses that could corroborate her statement. Not having any real evidence to go by, they let her go.

A few days later they sent a Catholic priest to examine her. He asked her many questions about the Catechism and about the Catholic religion. My sister was very intelligent, and had prepared ahead of time for such an eventuality. She had been going to

church and tried to learn as much as she could of the religious prayers and beliefs so that she would not be suspected. She had gotten a hold of a prayerbook which she studies diligently. She did very well with the questions, and said that she probably knew more about the Catholic religion than many Polish Catholics. Since she knew everything so well, they had let her go. However, a few days after they came again and asked her to go with them to the police station for further questioning. She agreed to go with them, but asked if she could leave a note for her boss so the he would know where she was. They let her go to her boss's office, but he was not there at the time. Since she was the secretary and understood the process, she typed on her passport/ID card given by the Germans that she was laid off from the company and was leaving in good standing. She picked up the company stamp and forged her boss's signature. This document would allow her to travel freely and look for another job elsewhere. She sneaked out of the office the back way, hurried home to pack her suitcase, and left town quickly without returning back to the waiting Gestapo.

When she arrived in Czestochowa, a man approached Irene on the street and offered to help her carry her suitcase. They walked along and talked for a while, and he told her he liked her and propositioned her to come sleep with him. When she turned him down, he ran away with her suitcase and disappeared. She did not want to run after him because she was too scared. She had stayed away from me until then because she did not want to endanger me as well. However, after she was robbed, she came to me because she did not have anyone else to go to. I told her not to worry. She could always get another suitcase and clothes again and in the meantime offered her to stay with me. She absolutely refused and said that if they find her with me, they will check my documents and will see that I am a Jew and it will be very dangerous for the both of us. I agreed and helped her find a place to spend the night in a cheap hotel.

The next morning I went to meet her. She said that she decided to go to Germany where it was much easier to find work. She spoke fluent German, and a Polish woman coming to look for work in Germany would not be suspected. Also the chance that someone who had known her previously would recognize her would also be much lower. I went with her to the Polish Transport Station in Krakow to catch a train that would take her Germany to work.

As my sister and I were waiting at the station for her train to Germany, she noticed that the man who had stolen her luggage had followed her and brought a Polish policeman with him. They approached her to arrest her. I was standing nearby, but could do nothing about it. I decided to pretend I did not know her and was minding my own business. It was a very dangerous situation. When they took her away, I feared the worst for her and was afraid I had lost her for good. She was the last person that I knew to be alive from my family. I loved her very much but could do nothing to help her. I helplessly had to stay away myself before I too was apprehended as an accomplice.

A short time later, I got a telephone call from my sister that they had let her go. She asked me to come back to the station, but not to approach her directly. I was to lead her to a place where we could not be observed together, and she would follow at a safe distance. I led her back to the place where I had been staying, and we arrived there safely. She told me the following story.

There were certain Polish people who were looking for ways to take advantage of the Jews, by blackmailing them, cheating them, stealing from them whatever they believed they could get away with, or turning them over to the Police. The Polish fellow who had approached Irene on her arrival in Czestochowa was such a person. When she was taken to the police station, she was accused of being a Jew which she denied. She knew that this man had nothing to gain by accusing her, but certainly wanted to keep her luggage. If she told the Police that this man had stolen her luggage, they would confiscate it as evidence. There would be further questions which he may have difficulty answering and in any case, he would never get it back. While she was alone in the room with him, therefore, she told him to leave her alone and not to tell the Police anything he may have known about her or she will tell them that he robbed her. They will confiscate the luggage as evidence, and he will have nothing. He did not want to lose the luggage or take a chance that the police may punish him in some way and said nothing while she was being questioned. She answered all of their questions satisfactorily, including about her being a Catholic, and the police finally let her go. She let the man keep the luggage because she knew it was not worth the trouble of trying to get it back, and she was better off just getting away from him as soon as possible.

I took my sister again to the train station where we said goodbye as she boarded a train for Germany. She went to Schwartzwald, a region close to the German/Swiss border. She wrote many letters to me from there and I replied, sometimes sending her money. I had very little money myself, but I sent her what little I could. I loved her very much. As far as I knew, she was the only person from my family that was still alive. I knew my mother had been killed in the concentration camp, and I believed that after the Germans captured my father, he would not be able to survive for long. My life was getting somewhat better because I knew that at least my sister was safe.

Czestochowa - Hope for a New Life

The situation in Czestochowa was getting better and more stable. Henia, the sister-in-law of the man I worked with in the Factory would often invite me to their house for supper and I was happy with that. Henia lived with her mother, and her sister Helcia with her husband, and another sister, Wladzia. They lived in a small apartment that had two rooms upstairs for sleeping and a one-room kitchen downstairs with a small work area

from which they ran their slipper making business. A third sister was married to Waldek, who was Volksdeutsch and they lived in a nearby German section of town. I was working in the factory 10 hrs per day, 6 days per week and in the evenings or Sundays I started coming over to help Henia and her family with their home business of making slippers. They would obtain old tires and cut them up for use as soles, sew up the slippers and sell them. It was a hard job, but I was eating better and getting stronger and stronger. I became a frequent visitor at their home, helping them with the business, and eventually moving in with them.

After I had moved in, I tried to fit in with the family, but it was difficult for me. The men liked to drink vodka, and would frequently get drunk if they were able to get a hold of any. I had to get drunk with them just to be sociable, and because they said Jews don't drink, and I did not want them to think I was a Jew.

After I moved in with them, Helcia and her husband started to run their share of the business and household chores on their own, leaving Henia, Wladzia and myself as partners in our share. Up to that time, Waldek, Olesia's husband, would come every week for his share of the proceeds of the business, but once we had formed our partnerships, I did not see any reason for him to continue to receive any share if he was not working there or contributing to the business. This did not make me very popular with him. Waldek, suspected me of being a Jew and was always trying to find out for certain. His father was also very interested in this. One day his father told Henia that they believed that her boyfriend is a Jew. They told her to try to find out for sure, and if so, that she needed to get rid of him. She tried to defend me and told them to stop giving me such a hard time. I was a valuable member of the family and they should leave me alone.

One day Waldek tried to scare me and shot off his gun in the house. He was laughing and said all Jews were terrified of guns. I did not react. I wanted to show him that I was not afraid. On another occasion, he dropped ashes from his cigarette into my drink, and I became very ill. I had to stay in bed for a full month and thought that I might die. I knew that Waldek and I did not get along, but there was not much I could do about it since now I was living in the house as part of the family.

One day Henia told me that her mother wanted to know what were my intentions, whether I planned to marry her. She wanted us to get married so that I would become true part of the family and there would be no further misunderstandings. Before I agreed, I wanted to make sure that Henia understood my situation completely and would not enter into the marriage without knowing my full story. I told her that I was a Jew, about my escape from Lwow, and the constant danger I had been under. I explained that no one knew that I was a Jew, and it was very important for me to keep my secret. If anyone were to find out, not only would I be taken away, but she too, would be punished for marrying a Jew. She told me that she had suspected that from the first, and it made

absolutely no difference to her. She wanted to marry me no matter what. I told her that if she were questioned to say as far as she knew, I was Catholic as indicated by my documents. A few weeks later, we got married in a Catholic Church. On the day before our wedding, Henia was walking down one of the streets of the town when it was surrounded by the German soldiers, and all who were caught were to be sent off to dig trenches outside the town, to slow the progress of the advancing Russian army. When Henia did not come home that evening, I went to look for her and found out what had happened. I went to the German commander and asked him to release her. I explained that we were to be married the next day. He just smiled and agreed on the condition that both of us report to him immediately after the wedding. I agreed and we ended up spending our honeymoon digging trenches for the Germans.

When I agreed to get married, I did not think we would stay together after the war, and expected that once things turned back to normal, Henia and I would go our separate ways. However, it turned out that we were actually very good for each other, better than we could have expected given our different backgrounds. Once our son was born, we found more and more reason to stay together, and our marriage actually worked out quite well. We have now been married for 56 years and have had a good life together.

In January 1945, the Russians entered Czestochowa. I went to see them enter the city and I was very happy, since now the war would soon be over. The Germans were gone, and we can get back to a more normal life. One day, I went to the Russian commander and asked for permission to go to Lwow to search for what may be left of my family. As I waited in line to see the commander, I noticed my father was also waiting in the same line. I could not believe my eyes! I did not suspect he could have survived! It was a very joyous reunion. I was very happy. I finally had regained my father. My father was not dead! He survived the war!

My father had been in the concentration camp in Czestochowa until the Germans left. When he saw that the Germans were about to leave, there had been mass confusion in the camp with the final preparations. He used that opportunity to make his get away when the area was not as carefully guarded as it had been previously. He managed to get hold of a pair of scissors and made his way to the edge of the camp at night, cut the barbed wire and ran away. Such an attempt would have surely failed earlier, but in the mass confusion with the approach of the Russians, the Germans were preoccupied and not as vigilant as they may have otherwise been. Shortly afterwards, the Russians entered the city, but he was already free.

Later, we found out through the Red Cross that Irene had also survived the war and got in touch with her. It was a very happy reunion. She returned to Poland and made her home in Warsaw.

I took my father home to live with us in Czestochowa. Since there was no more room in Henia's house, we went to live with Waldek and Olesia for a while. There were six of us living in a small apartment: Olesia and Waldek with his father, and Henia and I with my father and it was quite crowded there as well. It was not possible for us to return to Lwow, since the city was now occupied by the Soviets, and all Polish people were deported to the Polish side of the re-established Polish boundary. My father therefore suggested we move to Krakow where we were sure to be able to find a better job and better living conditions than would be available in Czestochowa. By the time we set off to Krakow, Henia was a few months pregnant and we were very hopeful we would be able to make a new start in the big city.

Indeed, life in Krakow was much better than in Czestochowa. We went to Laszkiewicz to work and had enough money for food. There was plenty of work for sign painters and he and I were able to make enough money to find a small apartment for the three of us, soon to become four when our new baby boy, Chris, was born in April, 1945. I worked during the day and went back to the University, this time in Krakow, to study mathematics. Shortly after our son was born, my father went off to Gliwice where he heard that many of the Germans were moving out and apartments would be available. He found a nice four room apartment there and convinced the authorities to give it to him in compensation of losing his apartment in Lwow, which was now part of the Soviet Union. Later, Henia, Chris and I moved to Gliwice also where I attended the Politechnik to study Engineering. Life was getting better now.

After the war our situation under the Russians changed completely. I was able to get a normal life: to complete my education, become a successful engineer and eventually make my way with my family to the United States. I had the same rights and opportunities as everyone else and could forget about the horrors of the German occupation. However, try as I might, there is just no forgetting. For a long time afterwards, I could not sleep well at night and frequently dreamed about the events in the concentration camp. I dreamed that I was still there, trying to get away, but could not. I kept running around a barbed wire fence to see if I could find a way out, but there was just no way. I would have this same dream for many years to come.

I do not know how it happened, but somehow I did survive. The unimaginable nightmare was finally over, but I somehow could never feel totally safe again. Even after the war ended, I continued to take great care to preserve my new identity. I took great precautions to keep my Jewish background hidden, and made sure my children would be raised as Christians with no chance of being subjected to the horrors of the past. I felt I needed to continue to protect my family from the anti-Semitism that continued in Poland after the war. I wanted very much to forget the past and get on with my new life and my new family. However, this was never truly possible - my past has always stayed with me. My life was always plagued with doubts and uncertainty and the need to protect my secret.

My granddaughter Amy finally encouraged me to bring my past into the open. She wanted me to tell my story and offered to help me to write about it. With her help, I have been finally able to tell this story – something I was very careful to keep hidden all my life. Thank you, Amy, for being so understanding and supportive, for taking the initiative for writing this story and for giving me the opportunity to finally tell it. With your help, I am finally able to share my story with my family. They have a right to know about their background and the tremendous effort it took just to survive. It is now an important part of their heritage.

Many stories have already been written about the war. There are also many movies about this subject. Difficult as it is for me to read them or watch them, I feel that what has happened must not be forgotten. Some people say that now that it is over, you shouldn't speak about it or remember it. I do not want to forget it. The story deserves to be told. I will not forget, and I want my family not to forget. The struggles through the war are an important part of our family history and this story will ensure that the events of the war will not be forgotten. This was my life and the story can finally be told.

Thank you Amy.

I love you.

